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WHITE HOUSE FOR OSTP/RAO

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TAGS: [TSPL](#) [SENV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [PINR](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR THE JANUARY VISIT OF PRESIDENTIAL SCIENCE
ENVOY AHMED ZEWAİL

REF: A. Amman 2487

[1](#)B. Amman 2404
[1](#)C. Amman 2302
[1](#)D. Amman 1880
[1](#)E. Amman 1676
[1](#)F. State 71325
[1](#)G. 08 Amman 2154

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[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Post extends a warm welcome to Science Envoy Dr. Ahmed Zewail. Your visit will enable us to build upon a robust bilateral and regional ESTH partnership which has seen 18 USG agencies engage in ESTH collaboration with Jordan over the past several years. Despite the individual merits of each activity, our collective impact in supporting Jordan's science and technology (S&T) capacity and in kick-starting the R&D-Innovation-Commercialization cycle critical to employment generation and economic development remains limited. Despite its scarce natural resources, the paramount importance of S&T to Jordan's economic development is not adequately recognized or promoted. Your visit will help to elevate the importance of S&T and USG contributions to Jordan's political leadership. This heightened status of S&T issues will also result in increased expectations. Our S&T interlocutors are keen to see further USG follow-through to the POTUS June 4 Cairo speech; while your visit is direct evidence of that, you will likely encounter an impatience to hear of new U.S. programs that will directly benefit Jordan's S&T establishment.
End Summary.

Potential Programming for Science Envoy

[1](#)2. (U) Post proposes the following meetings and events (subject to availability) for your late-January visit:

- Meetings with Queen Rania, Prime Minister Samir Rifai, Chief of the Royal Court Nasser Al Lozi, President of the Royal Scientific Society Princess Sumaya, Secretary General of the Higher Council for Science and Technology Dr. Adel Tweisi, and President of the Jordan University of Science and Technology Dr. Wajih Oweis.
- A key note speech addressing faculty and students at the Jordan University for Science and Technology, which, based in Jordan's second largest city Irbid, distinguishes itself as a leading

regional S&T university with a 20,000 strong student body, including 5,000 international students.

- A roundtable with researchers at the El Hassan Science City, envisioned to become a leading science park in the Middle East.
- Media interviews with print and TV journalists.
- A reception or dinner event with selected members of Jordan's S&T establishment; deans of Jordan's leading public universities; civil society leaders; and select private sector representatives.

Maximizing the Impact of Your Visit

13. (SBU) There are significant opportunities to boost S&T collaboration and implement the vision of the President's Cairo speech through your visit. Given the structural S&T impediments outlined in Paragraph 11, we should use your visit to elevate S&T issues beyond the current, primarily technical and operational level interlocutors, to the political leadership, including the Royal Court. This would help Jordan's S&T community obtain increased traction and resources from its own government, academic, and private sector establishments. While we expect to achieve significant public diplomacy benefits from your visit, you will likely also encounter some impatience from Jordan's S&T stakeholders who have seen many USG visitors in "listening mode" and are now expecting tangible deliverables/programs that will directly benefit Jordan.

14. (SBU) Your visit could be used to announce new S&T initiatives where Jordan could play a key role. If funding is available for the

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Embassy Amman proposed Arab-American Science Partnership or a similarly ambitious S&T framework, Post proposes the following possible collaborations where Jordan could play a lead role (ref A):

--a) Requesting Jordan's political leadership to help convene a regional science policy forum at the undersecretary or ministerial level to support a critical science policy dialogue in the Arab region, while also providing the USG with a forum to unveil any new S&T initiatives;

--b) Supporting the El Hassan Science City or the Jordan University of Science and Technology in the establishment of a joint center of excellence with U.S. private sector participation in the fields of water, environment/climate change research, or renewable energy.

--c) Requesting the GOJ to provide co-funding support through its recently established Scientific Research Fund to any USG-initiated science fund. Another variant of a co-funding approach could be to jointly allocate some resources to the U.S.-Jordan Science and Technology agreement (similar to the U.S.-Egypt S&T agreement).

--d) Partnering with eight to ten of the Jordanian public universities in creating a "Junior Scientists Network" to join the National Academies of Science supported Frontiers of Science Program.

Jordan's S&T Establishment

15. (U) The Higher Council for Science and Technology (HCST), under the direction of Dr. Adel Tweisi, serves as the lead Jordanian government agency for the U.S.-Jordan S&T agreement and hosted the July 2008 S&T Joint Committee Meetings (JCM) in Amman (ref G). HCST is located within the El Hassan Science City (EHSC) alongside the Royal Scientific Society (RSS) and the Princess Sumaya University of Technology. Princess Sumaya (a cousin of King Abdullah), Chairperson of the EHSC and President of RSS, articulates an ambitious vision for the EHSC to become a leading science park in the Middle East. Princess Sumaya's father, former Crown Prince Hassan, is the patron of EHSC and related S&T endeavors, but leaves the daily operational details to HCST and RSS.

¶6. (U) Tweisi's key priorities for HCST include developing a National Information System for S&T efforts in Jordan, eventually leading to an S&T observatory to track and analyze the results of Jordanian S&T efforts (ref C). One notable success in Jordan's S&T efforts is the 2008 establishment of a Scientific Research Fund (SRF) under the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. The SRF receives one percent of the profits of publicly traded companies and in its first year has garnered almost JD 15 million (\$21 million) in funding with a significant portion available for research grants. This indigenous funding source could boost R&D efforts by Jordanian scientists and increase Jordan's current allocation of 0.35 percent of GDP to R&D. HCST plans to use an SRF grant to help develop Jordan's research strategy for the next ten years.

¶7. (U) Jordan also has 10 sizeable public universities, which despite frequent criticisms of declining educational standards, continue to be regional leaders. The USG has a strong history of S&T cooperative programs with many of these public universities, including the renowned Jordan University of Science and Technology (JUST). Most of the universities have research departments focused on specific disciplines, but all universally complain of insufficient resources, a lack of time for professors to undertake research, and limited support to commercialize their research results.

Strong Bilateral ESTH Cooperation...

¶8. (U) As many as 18 USG agencies have had some form of ESTH collaboration over the past two years in Jordan. Without fail, every month brings joint activities. Just a few days before your arrival, on January 11-12, Post will partner with RSS, the American Association for Advancement of Science, a Lebanese NGO, and an

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Egyptian journalist to hold an S&T Workshop for Jordanian media.

¶9. (SBU) The July 2008 JCM also resulted in the formation of six working groups (WG), which have had mixed successes but offer good frameworks for additional cooperation (ref G). The energy WG has successfully held two workshops to develop green building envelope standards. The health WG led to the signing of a clinical research training agreement between NIH and HCST. The agricultural WG has produced some collaborative activities as well, and the innovation WG held a technology transfer workshop in Amman in October 2009. Unfortunately, the education WG has stalled and is likely to be discontinued given a lack of definition by the Jordanian members. Also, the water and environment WG will need to regroup following an unsuccessful proposal that did not conform to current priorities in USAID's significant water and environment related programming. Tweisi and his new team at HCST (all of whom started in July 2009) are not currently focused on adding momentum to the JCM activities.

¶10. (U) The USG continues to fund a variety of successful joint research activities under the Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) program for Arab-Israeli cooperation. Several Jordanian institutions participate in collaborative research with U.S. counterparts through NIH and NSF grants, and there is continuing cooperation on a variety of projects in the water, environment, and renewable energy sectors, all areas highlighted in the POTUS speech. There also continue to be many U.S.-Jordan S&T collaborations between the private sector and academia that do not include the USG, testament to the strong bilateral momentum on scientific collaborations.

But Limited S&T Impacts

¶11. (SBU) Despite the strong bilateral collaboration, and the individual merits of each activity, the collective impact in helping Jordan's S&T capacity and kick-starting the R&D-Innovation-Commercialization circle, which is critical to employment generation and economic development, remains limited (ref A). There are many impediments to increasing S&T resources in

Jordan and to getting more "bang for the buck" from whatever little is available. These obstacles include: scarce R&D resources; lack of a science policy framework to manage and prioritize science in the country; weak S&T institutions with frequent turn-over (there have been three Secretary Generals in the last two years at the Higher Council for Science and Technology); internal turf battles within the S&T community; inadequate appreciation for patents and the potential commercial value of intellectual property; a propensity to spend money on "tangible" real estate projects versus S&T and "knowledge;" a brain-drain of scientists towards greener pastures in the West and in the Gulf; and, perhaps most importantly, a lack of a social contact between the scientist-inventor and society.

¶12. (SBU) Comment: While there are significant challenges for S&T capacity in Jordan, your visit provides an important opportunity to elevate the importance of S&T and USG contributions to Jordan's political leadership. Your visit will demonstrate that our S&T follow-through on the President's June 4 Cairo speech is a real and tangible priority for the USG. You will likely observe our interlocutors wanting to hear of new U.S. programs that will directly benefit Jordan's S&T establishment, and it will behoove the USG to be able to announce some new deliverables which address the challenges described in paragraph 11. From a public diplomacy perspective, your visit will provide an opportunity to boost the profile of USG engagement on S&T to a broader set of Jordanian audiences -- and even inspire additional Jordanian youth to dream of achieving scientific excellence. End comment.

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